

**Philosophy of Medicine:  
An Interdisciplinary Approach**

Spring 2009 Course K20.1294  
Thursday 3:30-6-10 715 Bdwy # 527  
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Office hours: Monday (Noon to 2:30), Thursday (Noon to 2:30),  
and Friday (12:00 to 5:00)

**Overview**

This course considers broad theoretical and philosophical issues in U.S. healthcare. We unpack the underlying concepts and principles that organize contemporary medical research, practice, and education. We look at the problems with today's dominant models of medicine and the possibilities of alternative conceptual frames. Plus, we consider how much the contemporary "healthcare crisis" comes from deep conceptual issues as much as the more obvious financial and administrative problems.

Surprisingly the theoretical and conceptual issues we tackle are rarely considered within medicine itself. Most medical inquiry focuses on narrow issues of disease from within a biomedical framework. It rarely steps back from the particulars to ask larger philosophic questions regarding the goals of medicine. Our task will be to focus on the larger questions that medicine tends to neglect. We do so to help imagine a future with alternative health care systems and different modes of practice. And we do so to help prepare ourselves for the day when we or our loved ones become ill and in need of medical care.

Although I titled the course "philosophy" of medicine, we will not be limited by philosophical writings alone. Our inquiry will be an interdisciplinary approach that draws

from medicine, philosophy, history, psychology, literary theory, anthropology, sociology, gender studies, disability studies, cultural studies, poetry, drama, and documentary.

**Texts:**

*From Doctor to Healer*: Davis-Floyd and St. John  
*W;t*, Margaret Edson  
*The Truth About Drug Companies*, Marcia Angell  
*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman

**Academic Year Calendar Spring 2009**

Spring Classes Begin	Tuesday, January 20
Holiday: Presidents' Day	Monday, February 16
Spring Recess	Monday, March 16 - Saturday, March 21
Last Day of Classes	Monday, May 4

**Class Schedule**

1.) Jan 22—Health Care Crisis and the Goals of Medicine

Rose: “Healthcare Expenditures”  
Hasting Center: “The Goals of Medicine”

2.) Jan 29—Biomedical Model

Davis-Floyd and St. John: Introduction and Chapter 1  
Flexner: “Medical Education in the US and Canada”  
Odegaard: “Flexner Curriculum”  
Reiser: “Becoming a Doctor”  
Campo: “Technology and Medicine”

In class: *Griffith's 5-Minute Clinical Consult* “Ovarian cancer”

3.) Feb 5—Biomedical Model Continued

Davis-Floyd and St. John: Chapter 2  
Donne: “Death be not proud”  
Edson: *W;t*

In class: Film: *Wit*

4.) Feb 12—Biopsychosocial Model and Patient-Centered Care

Engel: “The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine”

Cassel: "The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine"  
McWhinney: "Are we on the brink of a major transformation of clinical method?"  
Quill: "Fourteen Years of Colds, Conflicts, Cardiac Disease, and Cancer: A  
Clinical Narrative Illustrating the Biopsychosocial Approach"  
Hasting Center Supplement: "What is Hospice Care?"

In class:

Rimpoche: *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (chapter one)  
Film: Bill Moyer: *Dying* (Hospice excerpt)

Recommended: *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (chapter two and three)

5.) Feb 19—Humanistic Medicine, Holistic Medicine, and Beyond

Charon: "Narrative Medicine: Attention, Representation, Affiliation"  
Davis-Floyd and St. John: Chapter 3 and 4  
Aull: "Telling and Listening: Constraints and Opportunities"

Suggested:

Marcus: *Reflections on Humanizing Biomedicine*

6.) Feb 26—Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Encounters

Kleinman: "Culture, Illness, and Care"  
Fadiman: *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*: Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13,  
17, 18

**\*\*\**Turn in first paper*\*\*\***

7.) Mar 5—Sociology of Medicine

Freund, et. al.: "Who Becomes Sick Injured or Dies"  
McKinlay and McKinlay: "Medical Measures and the Decline of Mortality"  
WHO Report 1995: *Bridging the Gaps*  
Farmer: "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below"  
Campo: "Ten Patients and Another"

8.) Mar 12—Gender Studies

Ratcliff: *Women and Health: Power, Technology, Inequality and Conflict in a Gendered World* excerpts.  
Boston Women's Health Collective:  
*Our Bodies, Our Selves* excerpts from first edition  
*Our Bodies, Our Selves* excerpts on Child-bearing  
Passau-Buck: "Caring vs. Curing" in *Socialization, Sexism, and Stereotyping: Women's Issues in Nursing*

In Class: *The Business of Being Born* (to Lake's birth)

**Mar 16-20—HOLIDAY: SPRING BREAK**

9.) Mar 26—Disability Studies

Davis: "The Need for Disability Studies"

Wendell: "Toward a Feminist Theory of Disability"

Garland-Thomson: "Feminist Theory, the Body, and the Disabled Figure"

Lane: "Constructions of Deafness"

In Class: Film: *Sound and Fury*

10.) April 2—Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Industry

Angel: *The Truth About Drug Companies*: Introduction, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

In class film: Big Bucks, Big Pharma

11.) April 9—Overtreated

Starfield: "Is U.S. Health Really the Best in the World?"

Brownlee: *Overtreated* (excerpts)

12.) April 16—Cultural Studies of Medicine

Crimp: AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism

Treichler: AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification (excerpts) and AIDS, HIV, and the Cultural Construction of Reality

Lewis: "High Theory/Mass Markets: Newsweek magazine and the circuits of medical culture" (please see images as well)

Lewis: *The New Global Health Movement: Rx for the World?*

In class film: *Rx for the World* (excerpts)

13.) April 23—Practitioner Politics: Family Practice and The Professionalism Movement

Stephens: Family Medicine as Counter Culture

Bodenheimer: Primary Care: Will it Survive?

Woo: Primary Care: Best Job in Medicine?

Wear and Kuczewski: The Professionalism Movement: Can We Pause?

Lewis: *Medical Professionals and the Discourse of Professionalism*

In class film: NewsHour on Primary Care and Sicko pt I

Suggested: Starfield: "Contribution of Primary Care to Health Systems and Health"

14.) April 30—National Politics: Health Care Crisis and Reform

Rose: US Health Care System and Alternative Health Care Systems

Waitzkin: Health Care, Social Contradictions, and the Dilemmas of Reform

Callahan: *False Hopes: Why America's Quest for Perfect Health is a Recipe for Failure* excerpts

In class film: Sicko pt II

**\*\*\*Final paper due on Monday May 5th\*\*\***

### **Course Requirements**

Grades are based on three parts: attendance/participation (20%) and 2 papers (40% each). Late papers are graded down. The attendance/participation grade is composed of weekly class attendance and participation.

This is a seminar type class which means that discussion begins with student initiative. Please type out or mark two quotes from the week's readings about which you have questions or comments. In class, I will often ask you to read your quotes and discuss your questions or comments. Doing this assignment carefully not only helps you prepare for your papers and increases your participation grade; it also helps your classmates because it increases the quality of our conversations together.

The papers are 8 pages type written, double spaced. Please use the material from the class to develop the topic question I hand out. Back up your thesis with arguments and examples from the class readings. A good paper demonstrates that you've integrated the material from the class discussions and class readings and can use it to analyze your

topic. You do not need outside research for these papers. Use your energy reading closely and thinking seriously about the materials you have.

The grading scale for the class will be as follows: 93-100% (A) 90-92 (A-), 87-89 (B+), 83-86 (B), 80-82 (B-), 77-79 (C+), 70-76 (C), 63-69 (D), and below (F).